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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: PM MELES MEETS WITH FMR SECSTATE
ALBRIGHT ON DARFUR, SOMALIA, ERITREA

¶1. (SBU) Summary. While visiting Addis Ababa to promote the UNDP's Commission for the Legal Empowerment of the Poor, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi December 1 to discuss Ethiopia's support of the Commission and her concern about the deteriorating situations in Darfur and Somalia. Meles said that Bashir would continue his defiance of the international community because he feared the U.S. ultimately wanted regime change in Sudan. Meles recommended that the U.S. re-engage in Darfur as a partner in the dialogue between the GOS and rebels. With regard to Somalia, Meles said that dialogue was "improbable" and that limited military action to "divorce" the jihadists from the CIC was more likely. Eritrea, Meles contended, was not interested in resolving its border conflict with Ethiopia and has started a proxy war through Somalia. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, accompanied by the Albright Group's Manager of Communications Jamie Smith, met with Prime Minister Meles December 1 during a two-day visit to Ethiopia. Ambassador Yamamoto and poloff (notetaker) also accompanied the Secretary. Meles was joined by MFA Acting Director for Europe and the Americas Almaz Amha and the Personal Assistant to the Prime Minister Gebretensai Gebremichael.

DARFUR

¶3. (SBU) Secretary Albright spoke briefly about her role as co-chair of the Commission for the Legal Empowerment of the Poor and gained the Prime Minister's support for the Commission's work in Ethiopia. Albright moved quickly on to other matters of substance, including Darfur. Albright said that the American public was "at a loss" for what's going on in Darfur and pointedly asked Meles what he thought about Sudanese President Bashir. Meles cited two reasons for Bashir's continued defiance of the United Nations takeover of the AU mission: first, Bashir believes that any sanctions imposed by the international community would hurt Southern Sudan groups; and second, Bashir is convinced that the U.S. only wants "regime change" in Sudan. Meles said that Bashir plans to preempt a UN force by bringing the rebel groups together with the assistance of Eritrea and Libya. Eritrea, Meles contended, has influence over eastern Sudanese rebel groups and would be willing to help Sudan with the proper "compensation," including oil and normalized relations with Sudan. Meles said that a byproduct of the Sudan/Eritrea cooperation would be a possible rift in Sudan/Ethiopia relations.

¶4. (SBU) Meles suggested that the U.S. back away from any

regime change ideas in Sudan, economic sanctions or military action and focus on playing a constructive role in negotiations between the rebels and GOS. The PM added that the U.S. would need to help implement any agreements that result from dialogue. Meles noted that Egypt plays a substantial role in the region and the U.S. might think about engaging the country further on the issue. Meles said that the U.S. must understand that Darfur is a "waiting game" and there are not any quick solutions.

SOMALIA

15. (SBU) Albright reminded the Prime Minister that she was a private citizen (and not a USG representative) and lamented that Somalia was once again at the forefront of American foreign policy. Albright asked what Meles thought of the current situation in Somalia and about Ethiopia's intentions.

Meles said that there was a window of opportunity a year ago when the TFG was established. At that time, Meles added, the Islamists were contained to small areas in the country and the TFG wanted to establish law and order. Meles quipped that the U.S. was "not of the same mind" and preferred to seek out terrorists rather than focus on strengthening the TFG. Now, Meles said, jihadists have a seemingly unstoppable momentum and have nearly completed their takeover of the country.

16. (SBU) Meles indicated that there are only three areas of Somalia not under CIC control: Baidoa, Somaliland, and Puntland. Ethiopia's possible intervention is the only reason the entire country has not collapsed into CIC hands, said Meles. Meles told Albright that the U.S. understands someone must stop the CIC and does not oppose Ethiopian

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action to protect its national security, but worries that Ethiopia will get "stuck." The EU, Meles added, is "more ambivalent" than the U.S. Meles acknowledged that dialogue was the best solution to the problem, but said it was "improbable" that the CIC would engage in dialogue. Meles said that the CIC needed to be divided from the jihadists and that limited military action might precipitate this "divorce."

Eritrea

17. (SBU) Albright asked whether Ethiopia was getting bogged down having to deal with the "Talibanization" of Somalia and the ongoing conflict with Eritrea. Meles added that, at the moment, there was no threat of military conflict with Eritrea in the north. Ethiopia, he said, was prepared to move forward with demarcation of the border via a broader dialogue with Eritrea, but noted that Eritrea was not interested in dialogue. Meles said Eritrea's solution to the border conflict was to use Somalia to conduct a proxy war. Meles told Albright that Eritrea was receiving money from Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to fund jihadist activities in Somalia. He noted that Yemen, however, was a friend to Ethiopia and playing a constructive role.

NDI

18. (SBU) Albright briefly mentioned how she was disappointed about the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) expulsion from the country last year and asked how the organization might again operate in Ethiopia. Meles said it was a "unfortunate decision" to expel NDI and there were "misunderstandings" on both sides. Meles indicated he was prepared to work on the GOE's relationship with NDI.

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